

***The Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)  
September 19, 2021  
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #36)***

*“How, then, can they (infants) accept the Christian Faith? That requires belief, and they are incapable of believing?” (Fathers Rumble and Carty, Radio Replies 2nd Volume, #735)*

A Protestant friend once asked why we baptize children. His question, not meant in any way to be dismissive of my beliefs, came from a background where baptism was viewed as something older youths and adults experience. As it was taught to him, when Jesus spoke of being born again of water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5), He meant it to refer to a “change of heart.” As he said, “Baptism with water is merely symbolic. It testifies to your inward conversion. It is the conversion which causes the person to grow in holiness; not the water.”

My friend proposed a very good question. At first glance, this line of thought is very reasonable. For we also understand Baptism to contain a “change of heart” which we would call repentance. Yet, I would propose that this one understanding of baptism is limited. It does not take into consideration our Catholic belief of the infusion of the Holy Spirit and sanctifying grace which allows us to be adopted children of God. We must never forget the Word of God (Jesus Christ) descended from His place in heaven taking our human nature and living a human life. He did this, not only to redeem fallen humanity, but to offer each of us a share in His Divine Nature. It is through baptism that we receive this new supernatural life; a state our natural births could never offer. We acknowledge that an infant cannot fully understand this, but the child’s parents and godparents are fully capable of understanding. They make a profession of faith on behalf of their child. This is fully acceptable because (1) the child, now older, will reaffirm this profession of faith as they prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, and (2) the belief of an infant is not necessary as it is not necessary in other areas of life. What do I mean by this second statement? Do parents need to wait for an infant to decide if baby food is good for them before choosing to feed them? Obviously, the answer would be “No.” A parent believes many things for their infants and children well before these can make a decision for themselves. It is the hope of the parents that the wisdom they conveyed and the example they set will one day be understood and appreciated by their child. In much the same way, parents choose the new life in Christ for their child praying that the child will grow to accept and value as much or more than they do.

This leads us to reflect upon one aspect from today – “Do we truly appreciate this new life in Christ?” I ask that knowing fully that some will say they do and point to their own children and the baptisms they received. Yes, the fact that you are now listening to me here, whether in person or via computer, testifies to your example and your beliefs. And that, my dear friends, is the most difficult part of any reflection. The people I, and so many like myself, would want to pray with, support, and encourage are not here today. Like you, they too

promised before God to provide their child or children with an example of Christian living by their own lives. You may remember being asked, as either parents or godparents, if you clearly understood what you were asking when you decided to have your child baptized and raised in our Catholic Faith. They too were asked this same question and where are they now? Many may point to COVID. Others will point to work. I think we can all acknowledge there are legitimate reasons for not being able to attend church on Sunday. I also think we can acknowledge, as well, there are some who do not attend church on Sundays for reasons which may be not as legitimate. These are the people we are called to assist. We can do this through prayer, offering sacrifices, encouraging words, and most importantly, inviting them to return. Please, we need to invite them to come home, not to a building, but to a family; His Family. We are the Family of God and these, our missing brothers and sisters, are part of this family; again, His Family. Please, He has done so very much for us (His Passion, Death, Resurrection), let us offer something in return as a thanksgiving. Let us actively strive to bring one of His lost and suffering children home to Him.